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SUBJECT: FM KOUCHNER'S VISIT TO IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (S) Summary: On August 21, during his visit to Baghdad, FM Kouchner asked the Ambassador how France could be helpful on Iraq. The Ambassador suggested that an active French role on economic development -- including bilateral and EU assistance -- would be helpful, as would French support for the neighbors' process. Kouchner was enthusiastic and promised to press the UNSYG for a more active UN role, but noted that he had recently spoken with Stefan di Mistura and found him more inclined to accept the number two position in WRP than come to Baghdad. The French Embassy in Baghdad separately shared its assessment of the atmospherics during Kouchner's visit. End summary.

Kouchner: How Can We Help?

[¶2.](#) (S) During his Aug. 19-21 visit to Baghdad, French FM Bernard Kouchner met briefly with the Ambassador on the margins of a lunch hosted by Vice President Abdel Mehdi. (Note: The French Embassy had arranged this lunch primarily to provide Kouchner with political cover so that he could see the Ambassador; the French were extremely anxious to avoid the appearance of a bilateral Franco-American meeting.) Kouchner asked what France could do to be helpful on Iraq. The Ambassador briefed Kouchner on UNSYG Ban Ki Moon's plans to co-host with Iraqi PM Maliki a ministerial meeting of the International Compact for Iraq on the margins of the UNGA in September. The Ambassador said that an active role by France in supporting economic development/reform in Iraq -- including through bilateral assistance commitments and by lobbying for similar EU commitments -- would be helpful. Kouchner was enthusiastic, and at the Ambassador's suggestion, discussed the subject with Iraqi DPM Barham Salih later the same day.

[¶3.](#) (S) The Ambassador also urged Kouchner to be actively engaged in the Neighbors' Conference process, and reviewed the challenges to Iraq posed by Iran, Turkey, Syria and the other Arab states. Kouchner noted France's problems with Syria over Lebanon but said he would engage anywhere it could be helpful.

[¶4.](#) (S) Kouchner said the new UNAMI resolution was a good step and said he would press the SYG for a larger and more active UN role. He noted, however, that he had spoken to Stefan di Mistura several days ago and found him more inclined to accept the number two position in WRP than to come to Baghdad. Kouchner said that if he were not presently occupied, he would like the job -- and joked that if we could wait six months, he would probably get himself fired and be available! He said he hoped to make a second visit to Iraq before the end of the year.

French Embassy Readout

15. (C) Alexandre Garcia, Chargé at the French Embassy, provided a readout on Kouchner's other meetings, which included discussions with FM Zebari, PM Maliki, President Talabani, Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, KRG President Massoud Barzani, ISCI Vice President Ammar al-Hakim, Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel Delly III, Fadhila parliamentary bloc leader Ali Shimmari, Deputy PM Salam Zuba'i, Deputy PM Barham Salih, and Iraqi journalists. Garcia said the French were pleased with the visit and its media coverage. "We got our message across," said Garcia, who added that Kouchner's talking points focused on: France's solidarity with and sympathy for the Iraqi people; a willingness to listen to all ends of the political spectrum; the need to ensure Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity; and France's willingness to work with Iraqis, especially in a UN context.

16. (C) Garcia was especially pleased by the atmospherics. As he expected, Kouchner enjoyed a warm reunion with his old friend Talabani (in fact, Garcia confessed that the French Embassy was afraid that the bond between Kouchner and Talabani would be so evident that it might be difficult to project the image of a balanced visit). To Garcia's relief, Kouchner had a surprisingly warm meeting with Tariq al-Hashimi and a Tawafuq delegation (Garcia had feared that the Sunnis might be "confused" by Kouchner's anti-Saddam stance in 2003). He also got on well with Ammar al-Hakim, in part because Kouchner fondly recalled his dealings with Ammar's late uncle. Among Ammar's guests was a Sadrism (NFI) who seized the occasion to call for the withdrawal of Coalition Forces. According to Garcia, this was the only interlocutor who delivered that message to Kouchner, and the French FM pushed back by noting that "the Americans are here,

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and they obviously need to be part of the solution." As for the Iraqi PM, Garcia said that Kouchner's informal style seemed to confuse Maliki at first, but he eventually warmed up to his French guest. Garcia denied (contrary to a report in the International Herald Tribune) that Kouchner had floated the idea of hosting "quiet talks" for the Iraqis in France as per his recent conference of Lebanese leaders. According to Garcia, the subject did not come up in any of Kouchner's meetings.

Zebari Delighted

17. (C) FM Zebari told Pol/C that Kouchner's visit could not have gone better. He noted that Kouchner remained mostly in listening mode, telling his hosts that he intended to digest everything that he heard in his numerous high-level meetings. He spoke in general terms about a larger role for the UN and mentioned thoughts about the solution being found in a "triangle" of intense, coordinated work between U.S., UN and Iraqi officials.
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